

Network Formed to Plant Churches in U.S.

Founded by Rice Broocks, ICE-CAP seeks to address declining U.S. church attendance among young adults. The group of pastors have teamed up to launch a church-planting movement.



[] A group of charismatic pastors has teamed up to launch a church-planting movement whose goal is to expand God's kingdom through evangelism and prayer.

The International Center for Evangelism, Church-Planting and Prayer (ICE-CAP) launched last summer in Nashville, Tenn., as an extension of Every Nation, an international network comprising more than 400 churches in 50 countries.

The organization was formed in response to declining U.S. church attendance, specifically among young adults, said ICE-CAP founder Rice Broocks, pastor of Bethel World Outreach Center in Nashville.

“You have this growing concern that the rate of people becoming Christians in America is not even keeping up with the population growth” said Broocks, who with pastors Steve Murrell and Phil Bonasso co-founded Every Nation in 1994 under the name Morning Star International. “I see a lot of church planting around the world but, when we come back to America, churches, according to statistics, are closing more than opening.

He noted that The Barna Group released a study last year showing church attendance declining, most prevalently among 16- to 29-year-olds. The report revealed that this age group tended to be “more skeptical of, and resistant to, Christianity” than the same demographic a decade earlier.

Broocks also noted the "4 percent theory" put forward by Ron Luce, founder of Texas-based Teen Mania Ministries and a proponent of the view that only 4 percent of today's children will become "Bible-believing" adults. In comparison, Broocks said, 65 percent of the World War II generation, 35 percent of the baby boomer generation and 17 percent of the current millennial generation are considered "Bible-believing."

"Think about all the things that took place under the watch of the baby boomer generation—abortion, prayer taken out of schools," Broocks said. "Think about what America's going to be like when this '4 percent generation' takes over. If we don't do something within the next five years, what is America going to look like?"

Hoping to play a part in changing those statistics, Broocks teamed up with author and pastor Larry Tomczak, who once headed People of Destiny International. Renamed Sovereign Grace Ministries in 2003, it's a pioneering church-planting movement that has established more than 60 churches in the U.S. and abroad.

Broocks also brought on board Dale Evriss, author and pastor of New Song Christian Fellowship in Brentwood, Tenn.

The team united to form ICE-CAP with a goal to contribute to world evangelism, beginning at home. "We've all planted a lot of churches, but the key for us is not about my church or Dale's church succeeding," Broocks said. "A key phrase for us is that 'it's going to take the whole church to reach the whole world.'"

It also takes leaders, stressed ICE-CAP director Tomczak. "A strong percentage of people in churches are not sharing their faith and have never led anybody to Christ," Tomczak said. "A lot of people are apologetic, fearful; they don't know how to present the gospel."

With that in mind, ICE-CAP launched its Leadership Training

Institute in October. More than 80 students converged in its first semester to learn about leadership through evangelism and prayer. Currently, the institute is wrapping up its second semester.

The group is also connecting with religious leaders nationwide to help develop strategies for church planting. But without evangelism rooted in relationship, little will change, Tomczak said. "Things have become too institutional, mechanical," he explained. "We've got to get back to the relational aspect, and that's critical in reaching this next generation. There's been a real disconnect there."

Tomczak said ICE-CAP is following a simple, foolproof model. "Our model for evangelism is Jesus," he said. "We've got to get out into the marketplace, into the highways and byways, and do like Jesus did—love people, engage people, befriend people, find ways to serve people." —**Suzy A. Richardson**